



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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We Can Disagree Without Being Disagreeable

By State Rep. Don Vruwink

I can't recall the first time I heard the saying, "Making laws is like making sausage," but I know I've heard it many times over the years. Now I hear it even more as a representative in the Wisconsin Assembly.

The saying is attributed to the first chancellor of Germany, Otto von Bismarck. He meant it's better *not* to see how laws are made and what all goes into them. However, the end product can be quite good if it has the right ingredients and is made the right way.

As I reflect on my first six months serving the 43rd Assembly District, I'm not so sure sausage is made like it used to be; at least this is the case when there is one-party control in government. One-party control seems to me to bring less compromise and fewer ideas to democracy. It also seems to bring out hyper-partisanship and a lack of civility between people.

I know democracy isn't always easy and getting people to agree is challenging. At the same time, we don't always have to agree with people on the other side of the aisle – or even those within our own political party. But when we disagree, let's do so in a civil way so our negative notions about government aren't reinforced every time we turn on the news, read the newspaper or check our social media accounts.

Disagreements take on a nasty life of their own when people respond and treat people in an uncivil way. And this not only hurts people, it also disrespects our lawmaking process and government bodies. To be clear, I believe disagreement has its place, but it should always come with basic decency.

Disagreement is not only a part of democracy, it is part of daily life. My wife Beth and I don't always agree on where to go out to eat or what movie to watch, and I know students and athletes didn't always agree with me on our game plan. However, even with disagreement, Beth and I expect and deserve civility toward each other, as did my students in the classroom and the players I coached on the field. We should expect the same from our elected officials.

Even in very divisive and polarizing times, I believe we can be civil and find ways to work together to do what is in the best interest of taxpayers. Let's find common ground and ways to compromise so we make decisions that have a positive impact on people, even those with whom we disagree. Instead of trying to prove someone else is wrong, unintelligent, or a lesser person simply because they have a

different opinion, let's listen and be civil toward each other. I bet lawmakers could be more productive and the results would surprise us all.

Rep. Don Vruwink represents the 43rd Assembly District, which includes parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson and Dane counties. He can be reached at Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov and at 608-266-3790. The mailing address is P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708.

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